

Notes From The Field: *STATEWIDE*

Season Wrap-up 1/7/2019

The late goose season wrapped up last week (Jan 3rd) in the Southern and Mississippi River goose zones concluding the 2018-2019 waterfowl season. Having been the trial year for Notes from the Field we would like to first thank all those that provided feedback on the survey itself and improvements we could make in the future. Also, we would like to recognize our field staff who took time out of their busy schedules and contributed their reports for hunters. *Please see end of the report for contributors.* This was the first year, in the 3-zone structure we currently have, that we have had a statewide opener. We have heard both positive and negative aspects of this, but we have heard reports of less pressure in the north making for a better opener in some areas. This year, we also saw significant changes in the regular goose hunting season with the elimination of the Horicon goose zone, and the Canada goose bag increase to 3. Both changes were approved, and the transition seemed to be smooth. The South zone also incorporated a second split to their regular goose season which allowed hunters to hunt late during the holidays. This late season was created to allow hunters to take advantage of the geese that were around while many are home, have time off, and aren't in schools during the holidays.

Weather

Much of the open water left in the state when the season closed was on fast moving steams, mechanically opened ponds, water discharges and big lakes such as Lake Michigan. 2018-19 waterfowl season was plagued by high water throughout the season that made hunting tough for some hunters and proved beneficial to others. Many areas were open to waterfowl that in normal years are not and that meant new areas full of potential food resources to exploit. Throughout Wisconsin in 2018 we saw

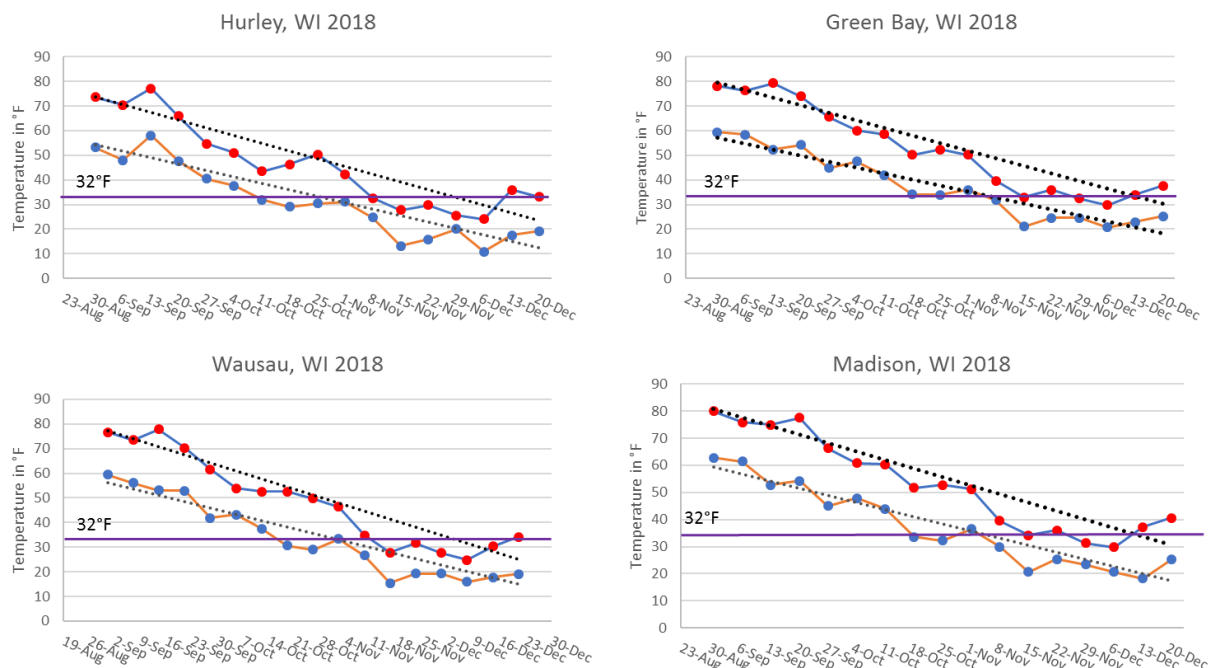


Figure 1.

one of the coldest Novembers on record. Fig.1 Temperatures in the state of Wisconsin between Sep 1. And Dec 21st, 2018. Red and blue lines indicate the average high for the week, while the orange and

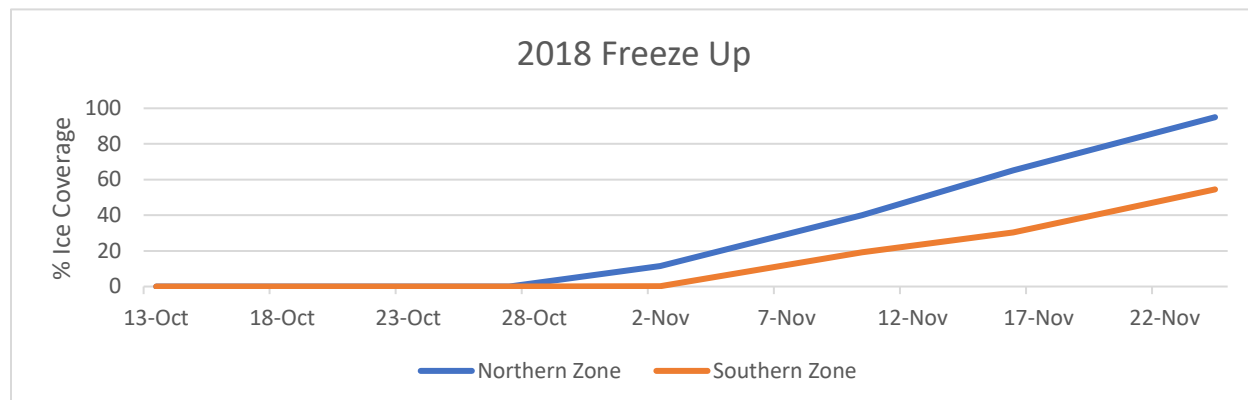


Figure 2

blue represent the average lows for that week. Black dotted lines indicate 5-year average for the highs and the lows of those weeks. Average temps were on average 3 degrees below normal for the entire time frame. This meant for much of the state earlier freeze ups on some wetlands and lakes people frequent for hunting. With assistance from our field staff this year we are able to get a look at the potential progression of ice coverage in the state seen in Figure 2.

Migration

Being an informal survey, we cannot begin to assess and provide actual numbers of birds in an area or on a statewide level. What we did do, however, was ask field staff to identify the most prevalent birds in an area and provide a migration update (Not yet building numbers, beginning to build numbers, peak numbers, beginning to lose numbers, past peak) as well. From the data they provided we can begin to paint a picture of migration in the state. In Figure

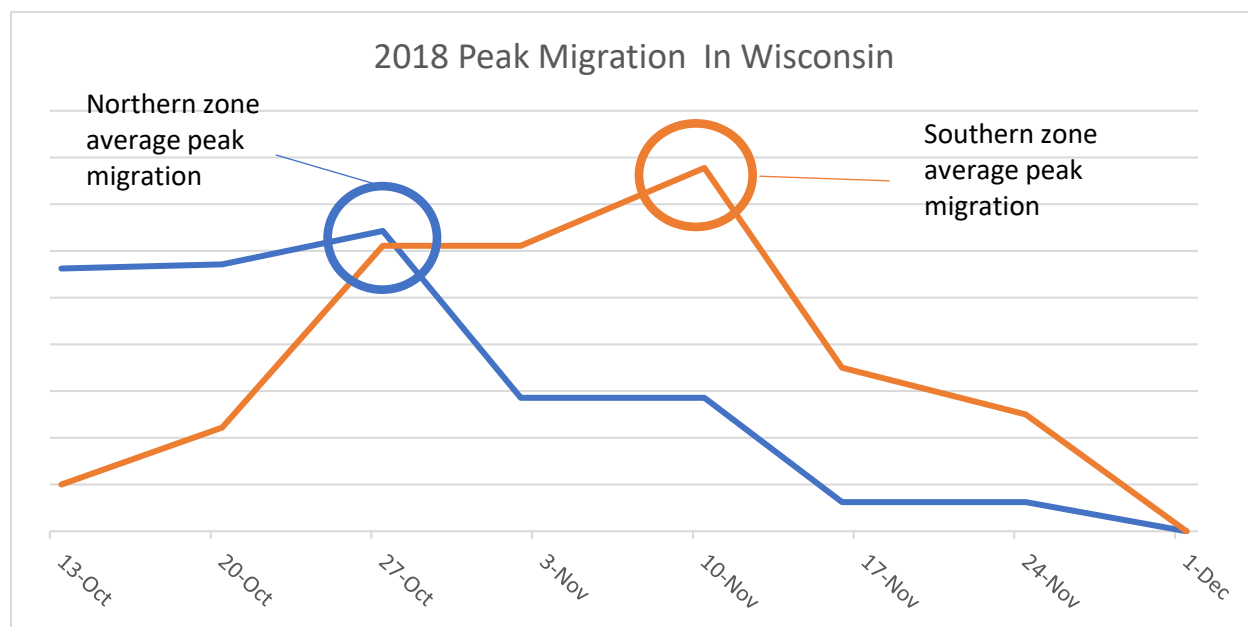


Figure 3

3, we can see that our data seem to show the main migration in the state began in late October in the Northern half of the state and carried on through the second week of November in the Southern half. A lot of what we hear and see on social media sites is that the Wisconsin's season needs to run later into the year. That the bulk of the migration hasn't passed until after the season is done. We recognize there are birds around after the season, but the main migration of birds typically comes through the last week in October through the second week of November during a typical year (our data confirms this is the case in 2018). The concentrations of birds that hunters are seeing after the season closes are likely due to a combination of birds no longer being targeted by hunters and birds now being concentrated on known bodies of water because smaller waterbodies are freezing up in most areas.

We also looked at the composition of the most prevalent species our biologist saw on the landscape. Interesting enough, our most common species during the course of the year

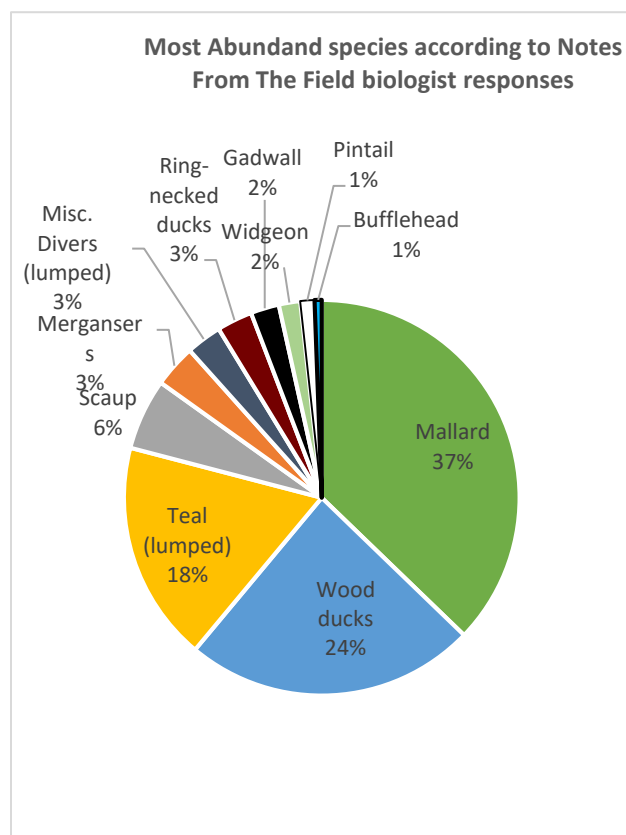


Figure 5

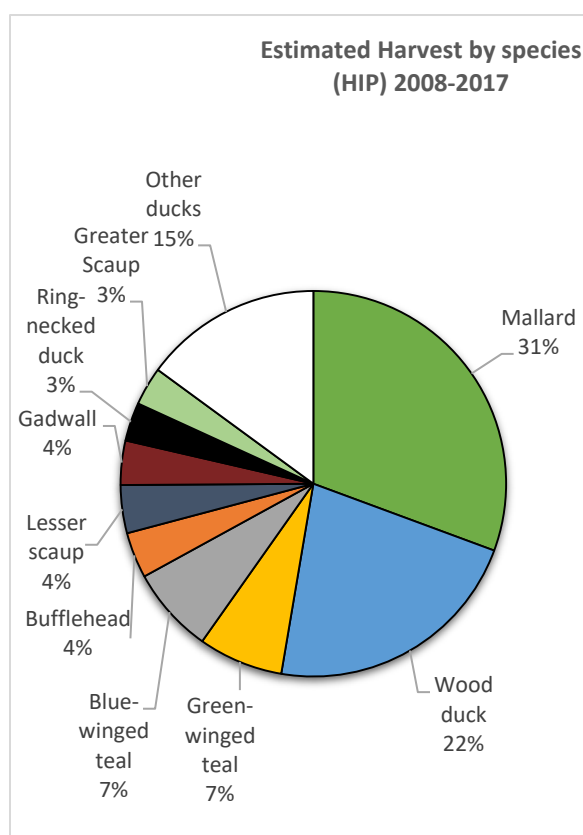


Figure 4

(shown in figure 4) are very similar to the HIP harvest survey results we receive each year (shown in figure 5). This data helps inform us as managers when the bulk of waterfowl are passing through the state and what species of birds are making up the bulk of the species in Wisconsin.

Notes From The Field In The Future

Having this information will be beneficial as we can begin to compare years and see how things may change over time. This will also allow us to have more data to present to different conservation and

hunting groups and allow us to make better decisions based on this information. We would also like to address those who commented on the lack of raw numbers of birds in areas or that updates didn't come from the county you were hunting in. Whether it is raw numbers or the lack of a waterfowl researcher at the beginning of this project or it being the first year of this project we didn't have the time/ability to make the ask of our field staff. Having Dr. Drew Fowler on board we hope to move forward and potentially one day be able to provide numbers of birds using different areas of the state. Along with that, we cannot provide updates from every county in the state at this time. Having multiple sources in an area of the state should allow people to generalize as a whole of what is going on in that area and use it that way rather than only in that county where that staff reported from.

Outlook for 2019-2020 Season

Duck hunting is a year-round process in Wisconsin. Every spring we look to you as hunters to provide public input on what you would like to see as the season structure for the year. We travel around the state to present to different conservation groups and collect public input. Every spring once the DNR has developed its proposal we look to hunters again to provide input on whether they approve or disapprove of that proposal. Our 2019 season proposal should first be available sometime during the week of March 4th -8th. Last year we saw a 400% increase in public input and we look to increase public input again this year. We will be adding a few new opportunities to provide input via online surveys while still using social media, email, WDNR website, public meetings, newspapers and radio to get our message out. If you would like to attend a public hearing on the waterfowl season you can attend meetings here:

- **Monday March 11, 7 p.m., La Crosse, WI.** - State Office Building, Rooms B-19 and B-20, 3550 Mormon Coulee Rd.;
- **Tuesday March 12, 7 p.m., Rice Lake, WI** – AmeriVu Inn, 1710 South Main Street;
- **Wednesday March 13, 7 p.m., Appleton, WI** - TBD
- **Thursday March 14, 7 p.m., Pewaukee, WI** - Wildwood Lodge, N14 W24121 Tower Place.

To become part of our email list please click link and select you would like to be updated on things waterfowl (<https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/WIDNR/subscriber/new>). We look forward to hearing from you.

Again, we cannot thank these field staff enough for their time and effort on this project.

Field staff involved in collecting data:

Brenda Kelly, Paul Peterson, James Robaidek, Sam Jonas, Derek Johnson, Josh Jackl, Jason Cotter, Scott Roepke, Josh Martinez, Eric Kroening, Paul Samerdyke, Nathan Holoubek, Ryan Hafele, Patrice Eysers, Bryan Woodbury, Erin Grossman, Travis Anderson.